

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Lilac Kaha

Lilac Loo Kaha, eldest of Kelly and Nani Lau Kong Loo's four children, was born May 5, 1961 in Honoka'a. The family lived in Kukuihaele. Her father worked in the family's Waipi'o Valley taro patch and as a laborer with Davies Hāmākua Sugar Company.

Kaha grew up helping her father and mother in the taro patch, going down into Waipi'o Valley after school and on weekends. She graduated from Honoka'a High School in 1979.

In 1980, Kaha began working as a mail carrier for Davies Hāmākua Sugar Company, eventually becoming a clerk in the payroll and accounting department. Her last day of work was October 31, 1994, when the sugar company, known as Hāmākua Sugar Company, shut down.

She lives in Pa'auilo with her husband, Burt, and four children.

Tape Nos. 26-6-1-96 and 26-7-1-96

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Lilac Loo Kaha (LK)

Pa‘auilo, Hawai‘i

September 23, 1996

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Lilac Loo Kaha, on September 23, 1996, and we’re at her home in Pa‘auilo, Hawai‘i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto. This is for the Big Island families oral history project.

Okay, Lilac, let’s start. Why don’t you start first and tell me when and where you were born.

LK: Okay, I was born May 5, 1961, in a town called Honoka‘a.

WN: Honoka‘a Hospital?

LK: Right, Honoka‘a Hospital.

WN: Mm hmm. Okay, so tell me your parents’ names.

LK: Okay, my parents names are Kelly Loo, Sr., and my mom is Norma. And her maiden name is Lau Kong.

WN: So, tell me, what were your parents doing in, up in this area, Honoka‘a? What kind of work were they doing when you were born?

LK: Okay, when I was born, we were living in a small town called Kukuihaele. And it was populated maybe about, not that much people. Maybe about three hundred, not more than four [hundred]. And my dad was born and raised down in Waipi‘o Valley. That’s about a mile from Kukuihaele. And my dad had a big family, a family of sixteen. And as they were living down in Waipi‘o, they had a taro farm, their rice farm, and they also did some hunting and fishing, a lot of those. And growing up in a big family, that’s how they had to get their living, like food, hunting and fishing. My dad’s father was a supervisor for the Hawaiian Irrigation [Company], and that came under Hāmākua Sugar Company. At that time, it was called the Honoka‘a Sugar Company [until 1972]. The sugar mill was down at Haina at that time. So I don’t know what part of (laughs)—what year they moved up to Kukuihaele. And my dad purchased the land up in Kukuihaele, and all the family moved out [of Waipi‘o]. My dad was working for his father, which is my grandfather. His name is Edward Lukana Loo. So as my dad was working with him, he took over my grandfather’s job as a supervisor for the [Hawaiian] Irrigation [Company]. And my dad met my mom, I guess, in Kukuihaele

(laughs), 'cause my mom was also from Kukuihaele, and she's a Lau Kong girl. At that time, she wasn't even working. And I can't remember what year they got married. (Laughs) And of course, I'm the oldest of six children, but just four of us living today. And we all was raised at Kukuihaele, when my dad purchased the place, you know, before they move up from Waipi'o. And that's where I was raised and born—I mean, born in Honoka'a, but I was raised up in Kukuihaele.

WN: So your father had sixteen . . .

LK: Sixteen children, and my mom, there was twelve of them.

WN: So your father was one of sixteen children.

LK: Yes.

WN: And your mother was one of twelve.

LK: Twelve children.

WN: Tell me something about your mother's family. What were they doing?

LK: My mom's family, I don't know too much (laughs), because I don't know my mom's dad, who is my grandfather. His name is Abraham Lau Kong. I wasn't born yet, but all I know about him, he was a strong man, tall man, he (loved to drink). That's what I heard about him. You know, he loved to drink and whatnot.

WN: He was Hawaiian-Chinese?

LK: He was Hawaiian, Chinese, and German. Yeah. And then my [maternal] grandmother, who's an Ah Puck girl, her name is Rachel, she's Hawaiian-Chinese.

WN: Oh, Ah Puck.

LK: Yeah.

WN: Okay.

LK: That's her maiden name. And she was a nice---to me, she's a nice grandma. She really took care of her children, while my grandfather (laughs) was drinking. So she was the one there just, you know, taking care of the children. As far as I know, she was also a taro farmer. And she worked for the Waipi'o Poi Factory, that was also located in Kukuihaele. So I don't really know too much on my mother's side.

WN: So your father's family owned the taro fields and the rice fields.

LK: Yeah, well, not really owned. They leased the lands, eh? Most of the lands was all leased down in Waipi'o. So they just, you know, raised taro and—I don't know too much about rice, but I know rice was also grown in Waipi'o, yeah.

WN: So you know for sure that it's mostly taro that they grew.

LK: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Anything else?

LK: No. (Laughs) No.

WN: Okay. Tell me something about Kukuihaele. What kind of town was it?

LK: Oh, Kukuihaele is a small town. Nobody bother, you just in your own area, your own house, your own yard. You can make a lot of noise. You wouldn't see any strangers coming by. If you do see, you would know who is one, but there was hardly any strange people around. Was mostly the local people that you grew up with or you knew. And as the years went by, growing up in Kukuihaele, we used to catch the bus going to school. It's about eight miles from my home to Honoka'a [School]. So that's where we attended kindergarten to twelfth grade. And as me and my brother and my sisters was growing up, we had a lot of fun. We could just roam around the area. You could just walk, and then, you know, not thinking that somebody would be there to bother you or think about all kind of crimes is happening nowadays, yeah?

But now, it's different. You can see all kind strange people come around. And it's a lot more people now coming out, you know, I guess because there's something to see, you know, Waipi'o. Like way back then, Waipi'o was always there, but there wasn't too much people. You know, not as much people as now. And so a lot of traffic, a lot of tourists that comes now.

WN: So Kukuihaele, people who lived in Kukuihaele, were they mostly taro farmers?

LK: Yeah, not too much---part taro farmers, and most of them were plantation workers. Majority of plantation workers.

WN: For Hāmākua Sugar.

LK: For the Hāmākua Sugar Company, yeah. [Until 1972, the company was known as Honoka'a Sugar Company.]

(Baby audible in background.)

WN: Was there a close relationship between Kukuihaele and, say, Honoka'a? I mean, I know it was fairly close, but did you go to Honoka'a a lot, besides going to school?

LK: Oh, yeah. We used to go and, well, besides school, that's where we get our groceries. (Laughs) You know, that's where we go . . .

WN: What, didn't have anything in . . .

LK: Well, they had in Kukuihaele, but was small stores, you know. I would say not as much groceries. You know, small things, yeah? And it wasn't like sale price, yeah? (Laughs) No

more like Longs [Drug Stores] (laughs) or KTA [Super Stores], eh? I mean, otherwise, if it's not for Honoka'a, we have to go to Hilo. But as we were growing up, my mom used to go shopping to Hilo, and we used to come home with a whole full load in our trunk. And at that time, when you look, the groceries in the trunk, it would cost maybe one hundred dollars, you know, and your trunk would be full at that time, you know. But today, you put one hundred dollars [worth of groceries] in your trunk, it's not even full.

(Laughter)

WN: Right.

LK: It's completely different. But I remember those times that we used to go shopping with my mom at Hilo. We used to come up with a full load. And sometimes we used to ask my mom, "Ma, how much did all this food cost?"

And she would say, "Oh, one hundred dollars." And to us was, hundred dollars! Wow! You know, it's big money, yeah? At that time. And our trunk was full!

WN: How often did you go Hilo?

LK: Oh, maybe like once a month. (Laughs) Once or twice a month. Yeah.

WN: And people who lived in Kukuihaele, was it mostly Hawaiians? Or was it different ethnic groups?

LK: Yes, different. All mixed. Hawaiian, Japanese, Filipinos. Yeah. Just about---and a little Portuguese. A little Portuguese people was living there. But I can remember Hawaiian, Filipino, Japanese people living Kukuihaele.

WN: Did you folks do things together as a community at all?

LK: Um, you know, I can't remember. I don't think so. I cannot remember doing anything. Yeah, because, I guess, like, my mom and my dad was, I mean, they were busy. And my mom was a full-time housewife. She didn't work at all. She took care of us. You know, she raised us. Then she didn't go to work. The only job she had was a part-time as a taro farmer. You know, like when we used to go to school, and we'd come home from school in the afternoon, we used to go down Waipi'o and do the part-time job. Clean the taro patch or pull taro.

WN: So tell me what you did.

LK: Okay. (Laughs) Okay, we used to do a lot. Actually, was me---because me and my brother was the oldest, yeah? Both him and I was the one that always used to go down with my dad and my mom in the afternoon, after school. My dad would be through at work at about 3:30 [P.M.]. So by 4:00 we were going down to the valley. And then he would have everything all lined up, what we going to do for that day, already. I mean, not for the day, but for the afternoon. Like we're going to clean this taro patch. So we'd clean taro patch. Or maybe another afternoon, if ready to harvest the taro, we'd pull out taro. And we used to keep the seed of the taro.

WN: Mmm. The *huli*.

LK: Yeah, they call it the *huli*. So it wasn't that easy, you know, where you're just going throw out the *huli* and just keep the taro. But no, you cannot damage the *huli*, right? Because you have to replant it again, yeah? And then also, on weekends, Saturdays like that, we used to go down for him in the morning. And that was a full-day job. But if we had activities at school, you know, we always would let my dad know that, "Oh, we have a football game coming up. Can we go?"

He'd say, "Okay." We go down Waipi'o early, and we'd be home at a certain time, maybe after lunch or something. But if we have nothing else planned for that Saturday, we were down there for the whole day. And he make sure that we work. (Laughs)

WN: Did he pay you folks?

LK: Oh, yeah. We had our allowance. But our allowance wasn't set price, you know. It was how he feel, he would give us, you know, amount. Or if whatever we needed, he get for us. Anything that we needed, like bikes or toys. That was our interest then, yeah? (Laughs) Or going somewhere, going shopping and buy clothes, like that, for school.

WN: You said, "Clean the patch." What do you mean by cleaning patch?

LK: Oh, there's weeds. What I mean, there's a lot of weeds. And there's different kind weeds. Get the *honohono* grass, is a crawling grass. It crawls like a carpet. (Laughs) So that's really thick. And there's a California grass. That's all I remember. *Honohono* grass, California grass, and had this other weed that used to look like—I used to call 'em onions. (Laughs) Looked like onion grass.

WN: Oh yeah? Like green onion?

LK: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you can't eat it, but it looks, it reminds me of onion. That's why I used to call it the onion grass.

WN: And this was growing in the . . .

LK: In the taro . . .

WN: . . . water?

LK: . . . patch.

WN: In the water?

LK: Yeah. In the water. And if you don't clean it, when time to harvest the taro, it's going to be hard, yeah? Because all the grass will be all, like, bushed up against the taro. It's going to be hard to harvest the taro. So if you can up clean every taro patch, it will be easier for you to harvest the taro. But it's nicer, yeah, when you go into a taro patch (that is) clean. You know, around the area is clean, not too much grass.

WN: How big was the patch?

LK: Oh, the patch . . .

WN: I mean, you know, like one football field?

LK: I would say maybe half—oh, wait, let me see.

(Laughter)

LK: Like a football field, maybe there was maybe could be (eight) taro patches. Could be into one football field. Yeah. Depends on the area, and the location of the patches. Sometimes you have square patches, you have rectangle. You can get oval patches, you know. Or you can have curve, you know, curve patches.

WN: Yeah.

LK: All kind different shapes. It depends on the area.

WN: So who's job was it to get the taro to wherever? Did he deliver it to a certain factory, poi factory? Or . . .

LK: Yeah, we had a place in Kukuihaele where we used to deliver all the taro, take all the taro. And his name was—I forgot his first name. I think it was Yubon Maehira.

WN: Yubon, yeah.

LK: He used to be the truck driver, that delivery. He used to take the taro into Hilo. And used to be shipped to Honolulu Poi. Yeah. So we used to harvest for Honolulu Poi [Company] and another place in Kona. These people used to come and pick it up, pick up the taro bags from our place.

WN: And let's see. So part of the job was the harvesting, part of the job was the *huli*, right?

LK: Yeah.

WN: So the *huli* came from the taro patch. You didn't have to get it from somewhere . . .

LK: No, no.

WN: . . . else.

LK: We keep our own seed. Yeah? That's the *huli*, yeah?

WN: Yeah.

LK: But sometimes if we're short of something, what they usually do in Waipi'o, they help other people harvest the taro. That if somebody need *huli* from us. Say if you need *huli* from me, you will come and help me harvest my taro, and I give you [some of] my *huli*.

WN: I see.

LK: Like if you were to go down there and start up a taro farm, and you needed *huli* from my dad, you would go and help my dad harvest his taro, and he would give you the seed to plant. That's how they used to do it down there.

WN: I see.

LK: Instead of buying it from each other. You know, instead of paying a nickel for a *huli* or something or buying it from outside. That's what the taro farmers used to do down Waipi'o. And they still do that. (Laughs)

WN: Really?

LK: Yeah, they still do that.

WN: 'Cause I know, like, over the years, probably when you were growing up, had lot of newcomers coming in to farm. You know, like hippies and . . .

LK: Oh, yeah, the *haole* people. (Laughs)

WN: Did they do that too?

LK: Well . . .

WN: Did they help your father at all?

LK: No, we usually did everything on our own. But some of the local people had what you call the *haole* people that used to move down Waipi'o. I guess if they wanted job or something, they would offer them job. Say, "Oh, can you clean my patch? And I pay you so-and-so."

WN: Yeah.

LK: Yeah, that's how it was. But for my dad, no. We did everything on our own.

WN: What about things like taro rot? Was that a problem down there?

LK: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Sometimes, you know, you pulling taro and you say, "Oh, it's rotten." We used to call it *pala hū*. (Laughs)

WN: *Pala hū*.

LK: *Pala hū*. (Laughs) Say, "Oh, daddy, *pala hū*, this taro." So we had to cut it. We use a sickle, and we cut it off, until we reach the part that is the good part, yeah?

WN: Yeah.

LK: We used to come across those, okay, time when the taro is rotten. And you would lose that much, too, yeah? Well, sometimes it's perfect. You get the whole taro, and it fills up the

bucket quick.

WN: Just a minute, yeah? I'm going to switch to . . .

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, what---I knew being a farmer is a hard life sometimes. I was just wondering if . . .

LK: Oh, it is hard. (Laughs)

WN: Yeah, I was just wondering if your father had to—maybe I can, when I talk to your father, but, you know, were there times when the yield was so low that you folks had hard time making ends meet or anything like that?

LK: Oh, (laughs) about making ends meet, what do you mean, in the harvesting the taro?

WN: Yeah.

LK: I don't really know that much about that, because we just follow him, yeah? We just go along. (Laughs) As we were growing up, we wasn't worried about anything, just do the work that needed to be done.

WN: Plus, it was part-time for him.

LK: Yeah, it was a part-time job for him. 'Cause he was working with irrigation, yeah?

WN: Yeah. Hāmākua Sugar, yeah?

LK: Yeah. So, that was a part-time, so I guess to make ends meet, I not sure about that.

WN: Probably was okay, because he had steady employment, yeah?

LK: Yeah, yeah. It probably was all right.

WN: Okay. What did your father do for Hāmākua Sugar?

LK: What did he do?

WN: Yeah, what was his job, actually?

LK: Oh, irrigation supervisor. Yeah, he took care of the Waipi'o ditches.

WN: He was working there for as long as you remember?

LK: Yeah, from (laughs) I don't know how old he was, but from young. From young. 'Cause I think he went to school up to fifth grade.

WN: Oh, your father.

LK: Yeah. He told me was up to fifth grade. 'Cause he never graduate. (Laughs)

WN: Your school, what, was always in Honoka'a?

LK: Yeah, my school was always in Honoka'a, so I went to school from kindergarten to twelfth grade. That's where I graduated from. And I didn't continue my schooling. As soon I graduate, I just wanted to work. I wanted to earn money. (Laughs)

WN: We'll get into that, we'll get into that shortly. But I just wanted to ask you, too, what did you do to have good fun? I mean, I know you were probably working so much, (laughs) you didn't have much time . . .

(Laughter)

WN: . . . for good fun. But what did you do to have a good time as a child?

LK: As a child?

WN: Yeah.

LK: Okay, well, actually, I had good fun, my brother and my sisters, growing up, playing together. And with my---I had aunties and an uncle that were same age, yeah? I have an aunty the same age as me, my mom's sister, same age. And I have another aunty who's two years above me. And I have another uncle who's about four years above me. So we grew up together, and we had so much fun. And they used to go down Waipi'o too. So we used to go down Waipi'o sometimes during the weekend. We used to go down and sleep at my grandma's house. My grandma had a house down there. Was kind of like a—not a shack. Waipi'o houses, they call it, yeah? And we used to stay down there for the weekend. We used to go fishing, go swimming. Besides working, of course we had to have those fun. And then we used to go fishing at night. We used to call that *lamalama*, where you go with the fork [i.e., spear] (laughs), where you go with the fork and your lantern. Used to go fishing. If not, and then we used to go down the beach, also go swimming. Yeah.

WN: Had fish in the taro patches too?

LK: Yeah, once in a while, but not *da kine*, I mean, small kind.

WN: Like 'o'opu, like . . .

LK: Yeah, the 'o'opu, or the catfish, or the little jo-jos, (laughs) you know. Or the other kind fishes we used to call the mosquito fish. (Laughs) Kind you can put in the aquarium. And they used to also have those *pūpū*, the snails that you can eat. I know the Filipinos used to like that.

Other than that, maybe we used to play in the cane field, or in the guava tree, guava bushes. Used to climb trees (laughs) up at Kukuihaele. Used to have fun. That's the kind of fun we used to have.

WN: Mm hmm. No more Nintendo, eh? Those days.

LK: No, no Nintendo, no computers. (Laughs) Yeah, it was different.

WN: Your kids going be reading this interview someday, so . . .

LK: Yeah.

WN: . . . you want them to know that . . .

LK: Right, right.

WN: . . . you didn't have.

LK: Yeah, it was really different. Not like nowadays, kids, they get Gameboy, they get the Super Nintendo. I mean, we had bikes, but nowadays, the bikes are—they have those lowrider bikes. At that time, we didn't have lowrider bikes. (Laughs)

WN: I'm wondering, too, you know, to go school [in Honoka'a] and then right after that, you folks, what, took the bus [back] to Kukuihaele, and then how did you get down to Waipi'o to work?

LK: Oh, we used four-wheel-drive trucks.

WN: So how did you feel that, you know, every day, you had to go down and work? Were other kids in your class doing that too?

LK: No. (Laughs)

WN: Did you . . .

LK: We used to think . . .

WN: . . . feel different?

LK: Every time, you know, we're in school, we used to think, "Ho, we gotta go Waipi'o today." Go home, we had to do our homework, and get something quick to eat, 'cause we was always hungry. We used to come home from school, used to eat, used to do our homework. And at that time, we didn't have too much homework as now, how it is today. And then get ready, head down into the valley, and we used to work there till dark. And we coming home in the dark already. And sometimes we are in the rain, riding in the back of the truck, me and my brother. But we are used to going up and down that hill, it was like nothing to us, yeah?

WN: Your father used to pick you folks up from school and go down? You used to all go together?

LK: Well, when my dad was working for the irrigation company, his station was right [near] our house. That's where all of his workers would work, I mean, meet him. Right at the house. And he had maybe about four workers, five workers. And sooner it went to maybe like only three workers. But they would meet at my dad's house in the morning. 'Cause they would have to go down to the valley, yeah? And go all the way in the back [of Waipi'o Valley].

WN: So you felt---sometimes you felt, eh . . .

LK: Yeah, all just hard, just have to do the work.

WN: Was your father strict? Did he say you have to do it? Or, how did you feel when you were doing it?

LK: No, I mean, he wasn't strict. Like when he said do it, we just have to do it. I mean, it's just like we obeyed him. You know, whatever he said for us to do, we do. Maybe we would grumble a little. (WN laughs) You know, that's how kids are, right? (Laughs)

WN: What about your mother? Was she strict with that? Or . . .

LK: No, she would just follow along too. 'Cause she know that the work has to be done, yeah? So she just would have to go along and do it, 'cause she know that's a job there, right?

WN: Plus you're the oldest, yeah? You're the oldest girl.

LK: Mm hmm.

WN: Oldest child . . .

LK: Yeah.

WN: Did you feel or were you given responsibilities to make sure your younger siblings went down and worked hard too?

LK: No, to me I felt it was just me and my brother (laughs), 'cause we knew how to do the job, yeah? So it's like we were trained into it. So when we used to go down Waipi'o and do the job, my dad tell, "Okay, clean the taro patch," we just do it. We knew what we were doing. And we knew how to do it already. And he tells me and my brother, "Okay, you have to go and plant the *huli* in the taro patch." Me and my brother was the planter. We used to plant all the taro patch. And then my dad would do the odd things like go poison the grass on the bank. You have to kill all the weeds. 'Cause if you don't, and the grass overgrow, it's hard for you to walk along the bank. So my dad would do all those stuffs that we cannot do. Poison, you know, it's hazardous to us, right? So he would do that kind stuffs. Yeah. So me and my brother would plant the *huli*, and we knew what we were doing.

WN: Well, what did your mom do?

LK: Well, my mom used to clean the taro patches too. Like if my brother had to do the planting of the *huli*, she would go and clean the taro patch, or her and my dad would clean the taro patch. Or if my dad was poisoning the weeds along the bank, she would be doing something like cleaning the taro patch by herself. So we all had something to do.

WN: So as the years went on—now, he still has taro down there.

LK: Yeah.

WN: Do you folks go . . .

LK: Not too much, no, I don't go. Because I get my family. (Laughs) Oh, when did I stop? Well, actually, we had a big storm that damaged our taro farm. I mean it wiped out. It was so sickening. Me and my brother plant our taro patches, and we look at it and say, "Oh, my goodness." It just wipe out. It's like you gave up hope. And then from that time on—I don't know what year it was—from that time on, we didn't go back to farming. So my dad rested for quite a while before he went back farming. But he opened up only one section of the taro farm area. You know, just enough for him, and my mom. So right now he has about, I think just six or five taro patches.

WN: Because of that storm, it really scaled back.

LK: Yeah. Just like you gave up hope already. It made you sick. (Laughs) I mean, it flooded out the taro patches. I mean, everything went in the taro patch—stones, gravel, dirt and whatnot. Just damaged the whole patch.

WN: This is rain and wind.

LK: Storm, yeah, rain. And when it rain, rain, rain, rain, you have this big storm, 'cause the water come from *mauka*, yeah? And just overtake that river, and you can't control water, so it just flood out the taro patches. And the taro patches was high. I mean, it was like high on the bank; where the water, river is low, below. But when that river raise, you know, come up high, it would just overflow and just wipe out. And the water just run into the patches.

WN: How did your father feel?

LK: Oh, he felt sick, I think. Yeah. I mean, it was a disaster.

WN: So from that time, you stopped, sort of stopped.

LK: Yeah, yeah. We . . .

WN: 'Cause he didn't need you then as much, because he had less?

LK: Yeah, yeah.

WN: And you don't remember about how old you were? Were you in high school?

LK: I don't know. I don't think I was in high school. (Laughs) Probably, I was (out of) school (already).

WN: Okay. So tell me something about school. What kind of activities were you involved in at school?

LK: School, not too much activities. No sports. Because of the part-time job that my dad had. So just like we had no time in getting involved with clubs or committees or groups. We didn't play any sports. My brother didn't play any sports. The only activities that we had was like going to the ball game or something, besides being in school. But we were popular in school

(WN laughs), I must say. No, we were. (Laughs) I don't know why. But yeah.

WN: You had lot of friends.

LK: Yeah, we had a lot of friends. Well, we knew most everybody. It was a small school, yeah. It's not like big school, 'cause we had only about 120-something people graduated, you know, my senior year.

WN: Yeah?

LK: Yeah. It's not like six hundred or four hundred, you know. So we knew everybody.

WN: Is this Honoka'a High?

LK: And elementary, yeah.

WN: High and elementary.

LK: Yeah, so, like I say, not too much activities, used to do in school, besides going to the, you know, ball game or something.

WN: So the kids that went to Honoka'a were either [from] plantation or Waipi'o Valley?

LK: Yeah, most of them were plantation workers' children. Yeah. And then we had kids that came from Pa'auilo and from Waimea. 'Cause Waimea [Elementary and Intermediate School] only go up to, I think was it eighth grade? And Pa'auilo [School], only go up to ninth grade. Then they would have to come down to Honoka'a [High and Intermediate] School, finish off, yeah.

WN: Okay, so, you went to Honoka'a High [and Intermediate] School and you graduated in 19 . . .

LK: [Nineteen] seventy-nine.

WN: [Nineteen] seventy-nine.

LK: Yeah.

WN: So when you graduated, you said you didn't want to go on. You just wanted to work.

LK: Yeah, I didn't want to continue my education. (Laughs) To me, I thought I had enough. (Laughs) I mean, I could have learned more.

WN: What did you want to do?

LK: Actually, what I really, really wanted to do was to work and earn money. That was my goal. I didn't want to further my education or to study more and then wait and see if I can get a job or something. I just wanted to work. So as soon I graduated, I worked at Mauna Kea Beach Hotel. It was just for three months. It was just temporary, 'cause one of the girls that worked down there was on maternity leave, so I took her place. And I worked as a lobby hostess,

where you greet the tourists. Welcome them to the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel. Explain to them about the facilities and activities that they have down there.

WN: Mm hmm. And you commuted?

LK: I commuted back and forth. And I didn't have my own car, so I have to use my mom's car at that time. I couldn't buy my car yet.

(Laughter)

WN: How old were you when you got your license?

LK: I was fifteen. Yeah, I got it early. (Laughs)

WN: Did you ever want to go into taro?

LK: No. (Laughs) I didn't want to go into taro.

WN: Did your father want you to or anything?

LK: No, no, no. He didn't push us in, being a taro farmer. He left it up to us. He told us, "It's up to you. If you want to go to college, we'll pay for your tuition, whatever needed to pay. But if you want to work, you work." So I understood his point of view because I told him, "Daddy and Mommy, you know, no sense we go to school if we don't want to go." Because, you hear a lot of kids that, you know, the parents pushed them to go into school, right?

WN: Yeah.

LK: And they don't study at all. "So I want to tell you, Mommy and Daddy, that if I'm going to school, I not going learn. (Laughs) I not going study, I prefer working. So I don't want you sending me to school and paying big money for nothing." At that time I heard a lot of people going to school, and they don't learn or study because their parents pushed them to go. So I don't want to be in that situation. I want to do what I want to do. So they agreed. They let me go to work. And I loved it. I loved working, you know. Because I was earning money. (Laughs)

WN: So that was part-time job? Mauna Kea?

LK: Well, actually, it was a full-time, but temporary. Was only for three months. 'Cause I knew I was going to be working down there only for three months. And what I was doing, I liked it, because I like meeting people, I like talking to people, you know. So the job that I was doing was meeting people and taking them on tours. It was interesting. So I liked it. But was only three months, then I had to leave. So that was right after high school. I graduated in '79, I worked at Mauna Kea [Beach Hotel] in the year of '79 for three months. I believe was from October to December. Then in 1980, I started working with [Davies] Hāmākua Sugar [Company]. April 3rd, 1980.

WN: How did you get the job?

LK: My dad. (Laughs) And it just so happened, I was at home, I was unemployed, and then my dad came home because that's the office, yeah? He would (go) and check. Once in a while he would come out (to) Pa'ailo. So he went to the main office, and luckily that day, he heard about it. They were looking for a mail carrier. So my dad came home—I remember that day—he came home, he told me, “Oh, Lilac, I can get a job for you as a mail carrier for the plantation.”

I said, “Mail carrier?”

(Laughter)

LK: I said, “What is that?” (Laughs)

He said, “Oh, they go deliver the mail all over the plantation.”

At first, I didn't like, I didn't care for it. I said, “I no like do that kind job, go all over, deliver mail. You going call me the mail lady.”

(Laughter)

He said, “Well, at least you can do something for now.”

I said, “Okay.” So I went for my interview, fill out papers and whatnot. Never take too long. I had the job, and I started in April—April 3rd, 1980. And when I first started, I started as part-time. Was only four hours.

WN: Four hours a day.

LK: But was real hard to travel from point to point in four hours in doing the mail. 'Cause I would have to start out in Pa'ailo, drive over to Honoka'a, down to Haina, go to Pā'auhau, back to Pa'ailo, and I would have to go down Pa'ailo garage, go to the 'O'ōkala [sugar] factory, to the warehouse, to the garage, to the post office, to the carpenter's shop, to the field office—all in 'O'ōkala now. Then from there, I would have to go all the way to Pāpa'aloa. (Laughs) To Pāpa'aloa garage. And to the Pāpa'aloa post office and come all the way back to Pa'ailo.

WN: So they had two mills then?

LK: Yeah, they [Davies Hāmākua Sugar Company] had Haina and 'O'ōkala mills going on.

WN: Oh, I see.

LK: When I was working. So it was real hard for me to cover that in four hours. And then plus I have to sort out the mail and get the mail ready, pick up boxes, packages from the post office. And then we have to get it ready for the next day to be taken to the warehouse, wherever it needed to go. It was hard.

So when they saw the way I was working, they said, “Wow, you don't have enough time.” So what they did was make it a full-time, an all-day thing. You know, do all the mail run,

and then, in the meantime, help out accounts payable. You know, with filing, simple-kind work for them.

WN: So were there lot of jobs available? Or was that really hard job to get? I mean, do you think . . .

LK: No.

WN: . . . needed your father's . . .

LK: Well, actually, I wasn't really looking. (Laughs) You know, after I finish Mauna Kea Beach Hotel for the three months, I really wasn't applying for anywhere or I wasn't really searching. I figured something will come, something will come. If I can find something, I'll find something. But at that time, I wasn't really looking. Then my dad just came home and then mentioned about that job. So he thought maybe, because I'm at home, he thought maybe it would be good for me. And I thank him for that, because I [eventually] got to work in the office. So it was like a training. It was a work training. I didn't go to school to earn that job. It was all training. We did a lot of training in the office. So if payroll needed help, I would help payroll. Any other department that needed help in there, I would help them.

WN: Okay, I'm going to turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, so how long were you a mail carrier?

LK: Okay, I was a mail carrier for about four years, yeah. Four years. Then after a mail carrier, I became a payroll clerk.

WN: This was in 1984?

LK: Yeah, around there, 1984.

WN: Was that a promotion?

LK: Yes. (Laughs) It was a promotion. I enjoyed doing the mail carrier, but I said, I cannot be doing this all my life. You know, going out and (laughs) delivering mail, you know? I said to myself, "I think I should be doing something else." Get ahead.

So when they told me that, "Oh, we have another job offered for you in the office, and it's a payroll clerk. Would you like to do it?"

And I said, "Oh, okay, I'll try." But there was a lot of training, and I worked with two Japanese ladies. One of them was my supervisor, and the other lady was the worker. So both of them trained me real good on this job. They made me like, you know, like you have

to—how should I say it? Like you have to be a firm person, be strong. That you cannot have anybody overpower you. It's not like you just dealing with the paper, you know, with the time card. You dealing with the supervisors who's making out the time card. So you know, dealing with them, you cannot just have them run over you.

So what these two ladies, this worker and the supervisor did, is that you have to put your feet (down) and just tell them, tell them what is right. Because I'm young. They used to call me the baby of the office, or the baby of the family. They told me that you cannot let them climb over you. You just tell them. If you get hard time, just (tell us). So they really helped me out. They really helped me in this department. And I guess that's how I really wasn't scared of anything. I wasn't afraid. I'd just go and do it. But I felt because I was young, I'd say, "No, they get more authority than me. (Laughs) I can't say that much."

And so, "No, no, you just tell them what is right. But if they give you hard time or what, you just report to me." But that's how I learned how not to be afraid. And then as the years went by, both of them retired. And then it leaves me back there, and I said, "Oh, no, no. What's going to happen to me? Who's going to work with me in payroll, you know?"

WN: Yeah.

LK: But luckily, I had this other person, his name was Ernest Tabac, and he became my supervisor. So I worked under him.

WN: So he took the place of the Japanese lady?

LK: Yeah, yeah. So he was my supervisor. I worked for him, with him for—ho, I would say maybe about four years. And he was really easy to work with. And then he liked working with me. Because he told me, "You know, you're so easy to work with also." And I told him, "You know, I'm a kind of person that's not hard to work with." I obey what they have to say and whatnot.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: So Ernest Tabac was easy to work with?

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

LK: And he was Filipino, and he is my neighbor. (Laughs) Yeah, he lives right up the first house on the top of the hill. (I really enjoyed working with him. He was so understanding and willing to listen to me. And he was always there to back me up at work. He's a great boss to me. One boss that is hard to find.)

WN: Right about the time you switched from mail carrier to payroll [in 1984], that's when Francis [S.] Morgan took over, you know . . .

LK: Right.

WN: . . . Hāmākua Sugar [Company].

LK: Yes.

WN: Did you notice any changes to the company?

LK: Well, there was a lot of changes. Manager of the office, of the accounting office. We had a lot of changes there. As far as I can remember, we had about three changes. And each of them was different. Real different. You know, in style. But far as where I was working, we worked the same way. (Laughs) You know, in the payroll, we were . . .

WN: It didn't affect you folks at all.

LK: Yeah. But different styles can be like how they want to—like I remember at the manager's office, one of the controller who liked to do training, interdepartment training. Like, if you have time, go to other departments and learn their job. In case there are absentees, you can go there and fill in. He wanted us to do a lot of interdepartment training, when we could.

And then, another boss, of course, came, and then he doesn't know anything. (Laughs) That's the way we took it. He doesn't know anything about accounting office. You go and ask him questions, he give you, I mean, it shouldn't be done that way. Should do it this way. But we have to follow his way of doing it. No backbone, no support for his office. You know, he don't back up the office people working there.

WN: This is the big boss. Or the . . .

LK: No, just within the office.

WN: Oh, okay.

LK: You know, the accounting office manager, like. Not the big boss.

WN: Did you notice any reduction in personnel over the years?

LK: Oh yeah, there was a lot. There was a lot.

WN: From the time you started through the years.

LK: Yeah. Mm hmm. Yeah.

WN: 'Cause that's when the---there were some---sugar was actually kind of phasing out.

LK: Yeah. Mm hmm. 'Cause that's why my dad them took early retirement. When they reached fifty-five, they took an early retirement. He figured that maybe it's time for him to go. Because it was really getting terrible. (Laughs) I won't mention names. (Laughs) But we had this big boss that came in. It was terrible. We used to have these, call it the Black Fridays. Every Friday they would come. Some of the supervisors' heads would be chopped. I don't mean chopped physically, but what I mean is like chopped from the job, cut off from the job.

WN: Supervisors?

LK: Mm hmm. Supervisors, salary employees. It was just like it was already too late. To me, I felt this sugar company was too much top-heavy. Too much super managers, you know, over supervisors.

WN: What about working people? Were they laid off during these Black Fridays too?

LK: Yes, yes, some of them was laid off.

WN: And when did you first start to think, you know, maybe I'm not going to be here for the rest of my life?

LK: When they filed bankruptcy [Chapter 11]. (Laughs) Yeah. When they filed bankruptcy, I said, "Oh, well, I guess we not going retire from the sugar company."

WN: But that was when . . .

LK: Other than that, yeah, other than that, I thought I was going to retire, you know? Continue working for the sugar company. But as soon we heard the news that they were going to file bankruptcy, we really didn't think it would have happened. But it happened, yeah? When we got that news.

WN: Okay.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, so how did you first hear about the closing?

LK: Well, we could sense a little, yeah? In the office. But you don't hear the full story about it. You know, like something is happening. Like the company is losing money. So just like you have a feeling something is going to happen, it's going to fall off or what. Then sure enough---they keep on meeting, meeting, and they always used to meet at the main office where I used to work. And we used to see them always coming (to) meetings. There was so much meetings. Meetings, meetings, meetings. Sometimes we used to wonder, "Why are they having so much meetings when the work is out there (laughs) out in the field?" But you would hear one of the workers say, "Oh, something is happening." But we really don't know what it is.

Until one day, they called everybody together. They called everybody together and they announced it. That the company is forced to file bankruptcy. Yeah. So, of course, then, it was really sad. Everybody's face hang, like, "Oh no. How it's going to be? What's going to happen to our job?" So, to me, I felt that we were going to lose our job sooner or later. But we don't know when. Slowly it's going to phase out.

WN: So how long was it from the time you found out to the time you actually—when was your last day?

LK: Ah, it was maybe about two years. It wasn't too long. Yeah. Because we were on a furlough for about month and a half.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

LK: We were on a furlough for about a month and a half, and then we went back to work till closing for the final harvest [in 1994].

WN: Oh, the final harvest was---you guys actually went . . .

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: So the final harvest, people had—you actually were kind of called back to work, yeah?

LK: Yeah. 'Cause we were just furlough, yeah? For about month and a half.

WN: Oh, one thing I forgot to ask. Let's see. You got married in '85, right?

LK: Mm hmm.

WN: And then you had your first child . . .

LK: [Nineteen] eighty-six.

WN: Was that factored, that decision . . .

LK: No, it wasn't---no, no, it was nothing to do. And we didn't know anything yet about the bankruptcy. Yeah, it was too early yet, yeah?

WN: I see.

LK: Yeah. So at that time, it really looked like, oh, this is my future, you know? With Hāmākua Sugar. That's where I'm going to retire, but (laughs).

WN: So how did you feel? If you can tell me . . .

LK: How I felt about the bankruptcy? Well, (laughs) I mean, it was sad. I didn't cry or anything. But I just felt sad, you know, like how am I going to survive? How I am going to support my family, you know? But luckily, my husband, he can do anything (laughs).

WN: What was your husband doing at the time?

LK: He was working for Laupāhoehoe Transportation, trucking company, and then he quit from Laupāhoehoe Transportation. He came back for the final harvest with Hāmākua Sugar, and he was driving truck. In the meantime, he was looking for other job, yeah? And then, just before the closing of the final harvest, he found a job with Hawai'i Metal Recycling. So he's an (equipment) operator.

WN: Let's take a break.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, so you're telling me about how you felt, eh? When you found out that you weren't going to be working there anymore and you wouldn't be able to retire there. And, you know, it's something to me that's very sad to have found your niche . . .

LK: I mean, just like you had everything all set. Everything taken care of, all the benefits that we'd gotten. We really had good benefits from the plantation. And we lost a lot of them also because of the bankruptcy, yeah? And of course we had our home. Even though it was under the plantation—we didn't own it yet, like today—but at least we had a home, you know, while I was working for the sugar company.

WN: Where was the home?

LK: My home at that time was in Pā'auhau.

WN: And that was a plantation home.

LK: That was, yeah, that was a plantation home.

WN: So now, for the final harvest, must have been sad working, when you knew that it was going to close.

LK: Just like you didn't have---just like---oh, how I should say it? You know that it was going to close. It was a company that was going to close. So I didn't have feelings already. You just come to work and do what you supposed to do, and that was about it. Everybody's---morale of the people just went down, you know.

WN: Did you feel anger, besides sadness?

LK: Uh, yeah, anger with management. How things was dealt. You know, prior to the years, what was been happening. To me and to the rest of the people I know, they felt that it was too heavy. Top too heavy. Too much supervisor over supervisor over supervisor. All you needed is just one supervisor for the department. You didn't need too much top head. That's how I felt.

WN: What about the problems they were having with the environmental, you know, the pollution caused by the company?

LK: Well, I don't really know too much about that.

WN: Okay.

LK: Yeah, you know the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency].

WN: Yeah.

LK: Yeah. I don't really know. Just one day they came. (Laughs) I remember that one day they came to our office. And there was a meeting going on, you know, all supervisors and the managers was in the meeting. We're doing our own thing, and here I'm sitting down at my desk, and I'm sitting at the front of the office. We had a nice view. We could see anybody

that was coming to the office.

And of course here comes these guys, group of strangers coming. No identification, nothing on their shirts. But I remember they had dark blue collar shirts. Some of them had jackets. But nothing that says FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] or certain kind of agents, or special agents or something or something. Nothing. They just came right to the office. They won't let anybody go out of the office. And I was wondering, "What *stay* going on? What *stay* happening?" And then they go look through all the files and whatnot, all the mail that was going out. They was searching through all the mails. And was going, "What *stay* going on? Who is this people?"

And finally they identify themselves. They're special agents. They're the FBI. They investigating. It's to do with the pollution down in Haina. And I didn't even (laughs)---you know, I didn't know anything about it. So they thought they were hiding records.

WN: I see.

LK: You know, some kind of records. And to us, hey this is Hawai'i. (Laughs) This is not the Mainland. But that's how I guess they were forced to do those kind of---take action, yeah?

WN: Yeah.

LK: Like how they are in the Mainland, yeah?

WN: Yeah.

LK: Come right up to you and just do it. But then me, I said to them, "Wow, this is Hawai'i. We get the aloha spirit." (Laughs) We not those kind of people you watch the stories on TV, how the FBIs just bust people like that.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: You know the last day, when the plantation---the last day of the last harvest [September 30, 1994], they had a parade through Honoka'a.

LK: Mm hmm.

WN: Did you go?

LK: Yeah. I went because I wanted to show my kids. I figure it's the last time they going to see the cane trucks on the road. I mean, I didn't care to go, for myself. I didn't care to go see. But I just wanted to show the kids. And I know it's going to be sad, when you would have a sad feeling of seeing the trucks going by. And it was really sad. People were crying. It was sad. Of course, people clapped. Feel like saying thank you to Hāmākua Sugar. But I went---the reason was just to show the kids, the last of the trucks going on the road.

WN: I was talking to Mr. Mendes, Stanley Mendes, and he couldn't bring himself to go, he was so sad.

LK: Oh, he didn't go?

WN: He was all set to go, but he . . .

LK: Didn't go.

WN: . . . couldn't go, he was so sad.

LK: Yeah, lot of people cried. It was really sad. Even other people that wasn't working for the sugar company all came up, and they told me that, "Wow, it was so sad, yeah? To see the cane trucks." Because they lived there. They grew up in a plantation area. So they know how it is.

WN: Okay, I would imagine—because you were losing your job—you and your husband had to really scramble around for the paychecks. I mean, you had how many children by then?

LK: At that time, three.

WN: You had three children.

LK: Yeah.

WN: You had to scramble for like medical coverage, and housing and so forth?

LK: Well, the housing wasn't too bad, 'cause we stayed where we were, yeah? Of course, when . . .

WN: You could stay?

LK: Yeah. Yeah, like we were living down Pā'auhau in a plantation home, but I requested for a bigger house. So from Pā'auhau, we moved to Pa'auilo. So this is the house that I'm in. It's been three years. And I've been here from the final harvest. We really didn't know what was going to happen to the house. But lucky they had these people that took over. We had an attorney that helped us in getting the homes and whatnot. So at this point today, we have a house. We have our own deed. We're the owners. So we were lucky. We paid just \$1100. And actually was only for escrow fees, assessments, and for water and the community, what needed to be done, yeah. All those fees and paperworks that needed to be done also. That's all.

WN: So this---for this house?

LK: Yeah. 'Cause I was here, yeah? When the final harvest already.

WN: I see, I see.

LK: Yeah. So whoever belonged in the house that they were in for the final harvest, they had the choice to purchase it.

WN: So prior to the closing, you were able to buy this one?

LK: Yeah.

WN: So if you didn't do that, would you have been able to buy the Pā'auhau house? If you were still living in the other house?

LK: Oh yeah. If I was still in Pa'auhau, yeah, that's the house I would've gotten. But I was here already, yeah? 'Cause I moved here in '93. From Pā'auhau, I moved to Pa'auilo in '93, September '93.

WN: And then what about the other benefits that you were getting from the plantation, like medical? How did you folks manage that?

LK: Well, it was okay, because when my husband found another job, they had a medical plan already, HMSA [Hawai'i Medical Service Association]. So that I was lucky we had medical coverage for the family. So I didn't have to worry about that. Only, you know, like financial-wise. Like paying the bills, how we going do this? How we going do that? But luckily for six months, we had unemployment. But that was only for six months. Now what's going to happen after six months? How are we going to do it. It was hard. It was really hard.

So we really had to sacrifice a lot of stuffs. Like don't go out. You know, because every weekend, used to go out, take the kids. And when you go out, you spend a lot of money, right. So at that time, we had to stay home. The kids didn't have too much enjoyment. Maybe only to the beach, you know, just pack lunch and go to the beach. That's a place they would enjoy. We used to (go out on) weekends (and) go shopping. Go to the movies, and movies nowadays are expensive. And then maybe go to Honolulu or something for the weekend, take the kids. And now, a family of six, is hard. Everything is expensive. So we just have to sacrifice and just stay home. That is a sacrifice.

And the kids used to grumble, "Wow, Mom, we not going no place today?"

I said, "No, we cannot, because now Mom not working. Only Dad working." And kids, they don't know what is bills, right?

WN: Right.

LK: So you gotta explain to them that, oh, "You know, Mom have to pay for medical, going to the doctor. We gotta pay electrical. Mom gotta pay for food." But luckily, then, they had benefits like the food stamp program, which I applied. And I got help from them. But even though with their help from them, we still have to watch what we spending. We still couldn't go out and spend, spend, spend. So we really had to watch. Even till today. I mean, now we do it a little bit more. We go out and do activities for the kids. And if they want something we don't just get it. We tell them, "We'll think about it. We'll see. We'll see how our budget is and whatnot."

WN: So food stamps you get from government . . .

LK: Yeah.

WN: Anything else?

LK: Yeah. The WIC program. That's the Woman-Infant Care (program). That's where we get formula for my little baby, fresh milk for my two year old, cereal, cheese, eggs, they give beans, (laughs) package beans. Juice, frozen juice, the canned juice. That's all from the WIC program. So I looked for this kind benefits that I can get. Or if I qualify for it, I go and apply. But know that I can't qualify for it, I won't apply. So I usually call them up. We used to have a certain bracket. Like for a family of six, you cannot make over, maybe, three thousand dollars or something. You have to be below that. So if I know I can qualify, I go ahead and apply for it. And with this food stamp program, it's not a steady thing for us. I won't get it every month. If I don't qualify for two months, I automatically drop off, and I have to reapply again all over.

WN: So your husband's income fluctuates.

LK: Yeah, it fluctuates. It's different. Sometimes they will pick up a lot of overtime, and sometimes (it) will slow down. You know, just eight hours, yeah?

WN: So depends on whether his . . .

LK: So it depends, yeah. It depends on the income. Because the welfare program is really strict, yeah? Which is good. I mean, they really gotta look after these kind people who don't deserve and who should be getting, yeah? You know, sometimes I feel shame. Even till today, I feel shame using food stamps. I go to the grocery store, and I gotta bust out the food stamps. Sometimes I look who's in line, (laughs) you know. I look who's---I feel shame, I don't know why. But people tell me, "Why are you shame? You shouldn't be shame. You worked. You pay your taxes."

I say, "Yeah, I know I paid my taxes." But I don't know why I feel shame using food stamps. (Laughs) I guess maybe I felt like, oh, only the poor people should be using this. And just like you don't want to make yourself known that you're poor.

WN: Yeah.

LK: You know. I mean, you're not poor. Poor people, that's the kind people with nothing at all. That's the definition for me. Poor people with nothing at all. So I would say that I'm the in-between middle class. And the middle class people always get dumped for everything, right?

WN: Right.

LK: Yeah, so . . .

WN: Have you ever been---you know, you said that sometimes you feel bad. What about your children? I mean, I know they were affected when you folks couldn't go out and so forth. But any other way they were affected by what was going on? At school or anything like that?

LK: Well, not really, because at school, the teachers really helped them out. Like they would say, "Oh, Mommy. Mrs. So-and-so told us that, oh, we don't have to pay for our excursion. They going give all the plantation children free." See, the teachers, they know because they (live) in the (same) community also, with grown-up plantation workers. So there was a lot of support in the school. And in fact, the school really supported the plantation---how should I

say—the plantation workers' children. Like my children.

So the only hardship I think that the kids would feel is maybe not getting too much material things. I think that's the only hardship the kids would get. Other than that—I mean, like now, I'm here. I'm at home, 'cause I'm a housewife, yeah? I'm sitting down at home, and I notice people in the camp area. I say, wow, they get new car. They get new truck. They get boats. They get something new. I say, oh, okay. That's good. That's a good sign. That means they making a go. You know, they were plantation workers, you know. But they're making a go. But maybe . . .

WN: You mean they're making it with other jobs?

LK: Yeah, yeah. Or financial-wise. Yeah. Or maybe just a few of them still getting hard time.

WN: So you said that the school, you know, helped out.

LK: Yeah, uh huh.

WN: What about other, besides school, what about union? Were you part . . .

LK: Oh no.

WN: . . . of the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union]?

LK: No, I'm not union, so.

WN: Oh, you weren't union.

LK: Ah, but I'm sure, I think the union must probably had help out the workers. Maybe not that much, but I'm sure a little.

WN: Yeah. But you weren't a member of the union.

LK: No, no.

WN: Okay. What about your church?

LK: Well, my church—I mean, yeah, they would help you out. But they didn't have something, like, put together for the employees and provide them with something. But if you needed help, you would go to them. I could have gone and asked for help, but I didn't want to go. To me, I felt like if there is something out there that was going to provide you with something. I'll go and get what I needed. It's just like with this WIC program and the welfare program. Like, it's there, so I'll go and apply for it and get what I need, yeah? Other than that, I won't go. I won't make an effort to ask. If someone is willing to offer to help, I'll go.

WN: What about neighbors, or the community in general? Was there support?

LK: No, not really. Usually we just mind our own business. My neighbors, yeah. But we have a good neighbor, I mean, my neighbor that live below. Because we're friends, eh? (Laughs) So

you know friends help out friends. But far as community, probably I know a lot of people, they help each other. But I not the kind of person that going get involved. I just do with what I can. But I not the kind of person to mingle with the other people and just. . . . You know what I mean, yeah? (Laughs)

WN: Sure, sure. What about your parents?

LK: Oh, they helped a lot. They helped a lot. If I needed money, they would give me the money. What they used to do, they used to do grocery shopping for me. Every once in a while, they'd do a lot of grocery shopping. And they will come and deliver it here. Or they would tell me, "Oh, can you come and meet me? You know, and I get something for you." Oh a lot. A lot. They really supported, you know, and helped me and my family.

WN: Your father was retired by then.

LK: Yeah, he was retired.

WN: So he wasn't affected at all by the closing.

LK: No, no, no. Yeah, my mom and my dad helped me a lot.

WN: In other ways too? Like baby-sitting for example?

LK: Oh yeah. If I like borrow money, "Oh Daddy, I can borrow money?" or something, yeah.

"Oh, sure, sure, sure." And then in return, I try to pay him back, he won't accept it. He say, "No, no, no, no need." Because he know I having hard time.

But I told him, "No, I have the money. And I told you I want to borrow. You know, I don't want this to happen all the time. I asking you for money, and you no take." And it's been happening, you know, and he don't take. So in return, I try to do something good for them. You know, treating them dinner someplace or something. In which way I can, you know, that I could help them, showing them how much I appreciate their help. But that's how my dad---you borrow something from him, he no like you return. Especially money and stuffs like that.

'Cause him, he's---how my husband call it?---a cool man. (Laughs) He don't bother anybody. But he likes to talk to people. You know, he likes to talk. That's why he work with Waipi'o Tours right now. So he give the history (laughs) about himself. (How) he was raised (down at) Waipi'o and whatnot. And they [tourists] seem to really enjoy his tour.

WN: Well, I find it very interesting, well, I find it touching. You remember, we were talking earlier about how you helped---you had to go and help out in the fields, and, you know, it sort of maybe kept your family close.

LK: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah.

WN: And then . . .

LK: It seems like, I guess, you know how we were brought up. Until today, we are still close. Not close that we're going get into each other's hair every day.

(Laughter)

LK: Not that kind. You know (laughs) what I mean? But you know, we're still close even though we're far away. And we're about fifteen miles. It's about fifteen miles from here to Waipi'o Valley lookout. But even though I don't get to talk to them every day, somehow we get in contact and whatnot. Yeah. I don't know. I guess that's how we were brought up. The closeness, yeah?

WN: Plus you folks had to weather hard times together. You know, like that storm, for example.

LK: Yeah.

WN: Probably really tough.

LK: Yeah. I guess my father brought us up (to) work together. It was always working together, doing things together as a family. And every time we used to have this family reunion, get together, every so many years.

WN: When you were working for the plantation—I know you said you were going to retire there. But what about your children? I mean, you had become a new mother at the time. Did you ever think . . .

LK: (Laughs) I thought my children would work [for the plantation] during the summers. 'Cause they used to have this summer program—well, actually is summer hire. We call it summer hire. The kids who still (are) attending high school, they (would) work during the summer. So I thought being that my boy is the oldest in the family, I thought he was going to work during the summer. You know, you think about those kind stuffs while you working, like what's going to happen in the future like that. I really thought about that.

WN: Did you think maybe he'll work for the plantation permanently?

LK: No, I don't think so. I didn't think that he would stay here.

WN: Would you have encouraged that?

LK: No, no. (Laughs) No, I wouldn't have encouraged him for stay here. I would like to have my children go. You know, go somewhere, find something. If they like go to school, they can continue. I won't push. I won't push them going to college. If they could go somewhere and find something that they can work out and live on their own. You know, take care of themselves.

WN: So the closing of the plantation didn't really have any effect on what you wanted your children to be.

LK: No, I just thought, myself, (as) the mother, I would retire from the plantation.

(Laughter)

LK: No, I wouldn't think my kids would have—maybe just for the summer. You know, while they were going to school and just working during the summers is the only thing I thought about them working for the plantation.

WN: There's this concern now that now that the plantation is closed that, there's going to be an increase in crime, because, you know, kids—that the parents aren't working in the area, they're commuting, and so the parents aren't home as much. Do you see something like that happening?

LK: No, no. It's about the same. But I would think---just what you were saying that, you know, most of the parents might not be home and their kids be home most of the time alone. You'd think you would see the kids making troubles or something. You know, crimes or violent things going around. But to me, I feel that it's how the parents raise the children. Like if I were to go out and work, and I leave my kids and they go to school, and they come home on their own and nobody is at home. To me, I feel that it's my responsibility. If they did something wrong, it's my fault. That's how I feel. Because, to me, the parents should correct the child or should teach the child what is wrong. You know, what you're not supposed to do and whatnot.

Because like my two oldest ones, they go ride bikes, like that. And they go with other kids. So I told them, "If you know they doing something wrong, I don't want you folks to follow them. If they do something wrong, I want you folks to come back home." I said, "Make sure, don't get into troubles. Don't let me hear you folks getting into troubles." If they going do something to another kid or to somebody's house or something like that, I said, "Don't you folks do that. Don't get into trouble." Which they know. They know what is wrong. And they know what they going get (laughs) if it's wrong.

So I kind of teach my children, but I don't know (about the) other parents. 'Cause I think some of them, they don't teach their children. 'Cause I don't let them go out to play all the time. Especially on school days. You know, sometimes the neighbor kids coming, they calling my boy, "Kani."

I say, "Kani, tell them you won't go out to play today."

He'll say, "But Mom, I finish my homework."

I say, "I don't care if you finish your homework. You can study, you can read, you can do something else." But I don't give them that privilege of playing all the time. I don't want them to think of playing all the time, in their mind. Because if a school day, I want them to study.

Because you know the kids nowadays, they only think about playing, playing. Just like the other day, when was it, Saturday? My boy told me, "Oh, Mom, if I mow the lawn in front here, can I go and ride bike after this?"

I said, "No."

“Oh, Mom. But Daddy said if I mow the lawn, I can go ride bike.”

I said, “Yeah, if you mowed the whole yard . . .

(Laughter)

LK: . . . you can go ride bike afterward.”

“Yeah!”

I said, “Yeah. But if you only going mow in front and not the behind, you no can go ride bike.”

He said, “Okay, I go mow the whole lawn.”

You know, I tell him, “Okay, you finish your work first, then you can go ride bike.”

He said, “Okay.” So he was so happy. He finished mowing (laughs) the lawn, the whole yard—that day. And then he would go ride bike.

I said, “Kaniale, it’s not going take you more than two hours. It’s a small yard.” So I’m not the type of mother that would encourage my kids to play, play all the time. Because I don’t want them to play all the time. You know what I mean? ’Cause I see a lot of kids in this camp that only play, play, play. Because, like I say, the parents are not at home, maybe.

WN: So you think then with the plantation not around and the parents not working around here, that they’re not home more?

LK: Um . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 26-7-1-96; SIDE ONE

WN: Okay.

LK: I think it’s how their living is. You know, some of the children, maybe they run (their) parents. But I’ll never let my children run me. Because once your children run you, they going take over you, and they just going do what they want. And I can see it. Some of it is happening in the camp here. But there’s no violent thing or crime, you know. But maybe that could lead to the parents not paying attention. To me, I feel it’s the parents not paying attention to the children. Maybe that’s why the children just do what they want to do. But I try to keep my children in order. (Laughs) I make sure I know where they going.

WN: Think back now, when you think about the hard times in your life, okay? Think about those hard times, especially dealing with your family and your community, and then compare it to what happened when the plantation closed. And how you handled it—you were telling me how

you handled this, you know, with government help and family and so forth. Is there any parallels on how your father dealt with hard times? Father and mother?

LK: Well, no. 'Cause I really didn't know too much about what was happening that time with my mom and dad, if they really had hard time or anything. 'Cause I guess, you know, they won't tell us everything, yeah?

WN: Yeah.

LK: 'Cause we were so young, yeah? But as I was growing up, I felt that I could get what I wanted. You know, from them, as long as you work and do your thing. And compared to like now, even though my kids work and whatnot, they cannot get everything what they needed (laughs), yeah? You know, because it's too hard, because I'm not working, yeah?

WN: Right.

LK: And it would be hard if I were to work, because I have two younger children. I would have to send them to a baby-sitter. So it's going to be, like no make sense, like I go to work, 'cause I only going to be paying for the baby-sitter. So I might as well just stay home and sacrifice my time and just be a mom at home, and just raise them up until they ready to go to school and they all set, and I'll find a job. But other than that, I cannot recall that, how much hard time. (Laughs) You know, being with my mom, dad was—they not going say that much about it, you know.

WN: Right.

LK: Because, like I say, we could get what we wanted from my mom and dad. If we needed something, they get it. My dad had two jobs. And like for me now, it's just my husband. (Laughs) So we really gotta watch what we get. Make sure if we get this certain thing, make sure it's useful.

Like my husband, just the other night, we were talking about—at Costco, he was looking at this generator. And we were talking about generators, because my dad has one, yeah? And then my husband told me, "Ho, you know, that would be good, a generator."

I said, "We don't need the generator. Only going collect dust." (Laughs)

He said, "No, well, maybe we can hook 'em up. You know, hook 'em up to the washer and the dryer or something. We don't have to use that much electricity."

I said, "Nah, no need. Get electricity."

Then he told me, "You know what? One day, we might not get electricity. You know, we will be without it. You know, what *stay* happening in this world nowadays? What *stay* coming, yeah?"

I said, "You know, you're right." So I asked him, "Well, how much is the generator?" (Laughs)

He said, "Oh, costs like four hundred-something dollars."

"We can splurge that much money (laughs) for one generator?"

He said, "Well, you know, if we can, we should purchase one."

And I told him, "Oh, yeah. That would be good, yeah? In case of emergency." Just like right now.

He told me we should save water, because our church teaches us storage, yeah? Storage. Storage food, storage water, and storage a lot of first-aid kits and toilet paper. You know, that kind stuffs. And sometimes we wonder, "For what we going storage all this kind stuff?" But you can see it. We get drought over here. We gotta conserve water.

One night, we had no water at all. But luckily, was only half an hour. I said, "Oh no! How I going take shower?" (WN laughs.) Yeah, because (of the) drought. And the well or something wasn't feeding the water properly into the tanks. It was slow. You know, that's what I found out. They have a lot of problem with the water system now.

So my husband say, "Oh, I think we'd better save water."

WN: So did you buy the generator?

LK: No.

(Laughter)

LK: But we just had talk about it this past weekend, yeah? (WN laughs)

WN: You know, you said that you took your children to see the final harvest. You know, the parade and so forth. How do you feel about sugar in Hawai'i and the fact that it's—probably will have no sugar, or very little sugar, maybe on Maui, little bit, but that's it? What are your feelings about that?

LK: I don't know. (Laughs) To me, I feel like once the sugar is down, everything is going down. Everything in Hawai'i is going down, the sugar industry. You know, slowly everything phased out. Everything phased out here already on the Big Island. Ka'ū [Agribusiness Company] was the last one, yeah? They're out already. So (is) Honolulu [i.e., O'ahu], too.

WN: Yeah.

LK: They're phased out, yeah? And Maui's the last one, yeah?

WN: Well, there's one on Kaua'i.

LK: Kaua'i have one too?

WN: Yeah. [As of 1996, two sugar companies remain in business on Kaua'i; and two on Maui.]

LK: I shouldn't say this, but I don't think they'll do good. I think slowly they going to phase out too. It's just like a chain reaction thing, yeah? (Laughs) Once one go down, another company going down.

WN: So what would you like to see for this community?

LK: What I would like to see around here? (Laughs) Well, to get jobs, going to be like Honolulu, yeah? (Laughs) And you don't want to see that happening over here. You want to leave it how it is. You want to leave this community how it is. You don't want to see anything growing, like buildings. I don't really know. (Laughs) You know, I really thought about it. I had a question asked once to me. And I thought about it. I should have known what I really want around here. But honestly, I really don't know. Sometimes I wish the sugar company would come back. Well, that's my wish. I wish the sugar company would come back. Instead of having something else going on—coffee or papayas or what—I just wish the sugar company would come back.

WN: Would you like to see agriculture [remain] though?

LK: Yeah, mm hmm. Yeah, I would like to see other things being done around here. But I just wish the sugar company could come back, but I guess there's no way, yeah?

WN: Tourism, resort development, you know, that's probably come up.

LK: Yeah, that's what I don't care for. But if it has to be done to have jobs available for you, that would be good. But you don't want to have it, like, overcrowded.

WN: You said that you wanted your children to—eventually, if they wanted to—move out and see the world and so forth. But what if they say, “Mom, I want to stay here. I want to live here.”

LK: (Laughs) What you going do?

WN: What would you want to see them doing here?

LK: Okay, honestly, for us right now, okay, if my mom was here telling me, “You want to stay here? What you going to do?” To be open with you, the only job available is down in the hotels. And that I wouldn't like---I wouldn't like to have my kids (laughs) go work down at the hotels, too.

WN: You mean, Kona side?

LK: Along Kawaihae side, Waikoloa side.

WN: Oh, yeah, right.

LK: So, I mean, I wouldn't like to work down there. It's kind of far, eh? But like, if my kids tell me, “Oh, Mom, we don't want to go to anyplace else. We want to stay here. We want to live here. We want to raise a family.”

I'd say, “Well, you will have to find a job.” And the only offer I have to them is that you

will have to go down to the hotels and work. Because everything is so far from here. Either you have to go Hilo or to Kona or down to Waikoloa. But, it's going be hard. Eight to ten years from now, I don't know what it's going to be like. It might be different again. I don't know. (Laughs)

WN: It's because you're right at that generation now, where your parents . . .

LK: I know. (Laughs)

WN: . . . your parents are still alive . . .

LK: Yeah.

WN: . . . and still healthy, but they have their legacy. I mean, they've had their . . .

LK: Uh huh. Uh huh.

WN: So I'm sure they have their own . . .

LK: Right.

WN: . . . opinions about sugar.

LK: Right.

WN: And so forth.

LK: So, you know, that comes back to me. Because, it's like they raised their children, my parents raised us. They took care of us. They don't have to worry about us because I have a home. Well, maybe they worry a little. I have a home. My sister have a home. My brother going to have their big house. My other sister on the Mainland have their home. So it's like we taken care of. But I think what they worried about more is their grandchildren.

WN: Right.

LK: What they going to do, and how it's going to be like. So like you say, it's us now, we're the parent. We're in the middle yeah? So now we're going to worry about our children. We gotta take care of now. Are they going to be able to have their own house? To live on their own? To support themselves? That's what a parent worries, you know? They can't make it, of course you as a parent gotta help them, right? Just like how my parents helped me.

But I do think about it, you know. I said, wow, you know, being a parent, it's never the end. It's never the end. Because you have grandchildren. So like if my four children are grown up, they have a house of their own, they have good job, now you going to worry about your grandchildren. So of course no more end. (Laughs) There's no end to it. And of course like I say, my parents worried about us as children. And then now they going be worried about their grandchildren. And they do. And you know, they not only support me as a daughter. They support their grandchildren, too. They support my children. Yeah. They're real supportive, you know.

So they [the children] lucky. They're lucky. Because my husband's side, we don't bother too much. And they don't bother with us that much. That's why my husband, he's not as close. That's why he always tell our children that, "Oh, you lucky, yeah? Lucky Mama and Papa Loo give you money." Like we went Honolulu, they all had \$100 each. And the father goes, you know, my husband goes to them, "Wow! You folks had \$100 each? That's 400 bucks right there (laughs) for four children!"

I said, "Of course, Burt. What they going do with \$20 or \$10? They cannot buy anything."

But that's how supportive---and they really treat everybody equal. You know, all of us. And maybe that's why we don't have to have any kind of hardship among each other. You know, because we are all treated equal. They don't favor one child. Like, you know, give to one child all the time, no. And they really work hard for us. I mean, I don't know how I should say it. Like when we moved to Pā'auhau and then we moved over here, they were so supportive. They buy what we needed for the house. And I don't tell them that I need this and that. My mom would just come and look in the house. She say, "Oh, Lilac. You need this. You need that. You need this." And she go. They made these curtains for me.

WN: Oh, nice, yeah.

LK: She bought my rug for me. This rug here. She bought all my rugs. But I had all the appliances already because we were down Pā'auhau. But my dad bought the appliances when we first moved to Pā'auhau. And I didn't tell them that I needed---you know, they know that I needed it.

It was so surprising. They just come and say, "Oh, we know you needed one TV. We know you needed icebox. We know you needed stove," you know. And then my in-laws helped a little. (Laughs) We had to ask. (Laughs)

WN: I wonder if it's maybe the Waipi'o Valley *'ohana* . . .

LK: No, no, no. Because everybody is different.

WN: Right.

LK: Because my father's brothers are (different). Or their wives are (also different). I won't talk about their part, yeah? But far as my (family, they are full of aloha). My mom and dad is the type of person that, if your child needs it, they will get it. Without asking, they just come out and they just help you. In fact, when we moved here, my mom was on the Mainland. (Laughs) So she didn't see this house yet until she came back from the Mainland. And when she came back from the Mainland, she looked at the house and said, "Okay, you need this, you need that." (WN laughs.) Yeah, she just buy. They were so helpful. I don't know much more (laughs) . . .

WN: Before I turn off the tape recorder? (LK laughs.) Anything that you want to say?

LK: Anything about the, you mean . . .

WN: Anything about your life? What you've done? Or what you plan to do?

LK: Well, I would like to thank my parents of course. If it wasn't for them, I know I wouldn't be here. Especially for my dad. He found me the job to work with the plantation, which I didn't want at first, but I was lucky. I was happy afterwards, getting out there and being social with other people, get to know other people's ways and means, and then working with them. And then learning job training within the office. I'm thankful for that. And even though the sugar company has shut down, I still have that aloha for the company, even though I said I was going to retire (laughs) from the sugar company. But I'm glad, and I'm happy, even though we still have hard time financial-wise and whatnot. But I'm happy 'cause I have a home. And I can support enough for my family. Not much, but enough that we can be whole together, you know, as one. Yeah? And I'd also like to thank you.

(Laughter)

LK: No, no, I mean, you know, coming out. This is really a good program. You know, coming out and then, you know, get to know about other people, their feelings about, and then putting this thing together. It's going to be good, in the future for the children.

WN: Sure.

LK: You know, doing research. And for them to learn more, what's been happening from their time, back then. How it was. So I'd like to thank you.

WN: Thank you. Appreciate it very much. Thank you.

LK: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

THE CLOSING OF SUGAR PLANTATIONS:

**Interviews with Families
of Hāmākua and Kaʻū, Hawaiʻi**

Volume I

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
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